

Women in British history

By Linda Laws
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The role of women in this country throughout history has often been the result of a tough and hard fight, but many have endured to attain their rightful and due place in our history books.

Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928)

One of the most significant landmarks for women in this country would have to be getting the vote. But this did not come without a struggle.

Emmeline Pankhurst spearheaded the "Suffragette" movement and campaigned with her group of followers during a period of 40 years to get the vote for women. She founded the Women's Social and Political Union in Manchester in 1903. The movement was not always popular because of some of the militant tactics they used. These involved attempting to disrupt debates in Parliament and chaining themselves to railings while volubly making their case. Pankhurst was jailed three times during this time.

The efforts of her and her followers were not in vain, and in 1928, The Representation of the People Act established voting equality for men and women. Unfortunately it was too late for Pankhurst, because she died just a few weeks before the bill was passed.

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910)

Living at the same time as Emmeline Pankhurst, was the famous nurse Florence Nightingale who was also known as the "Lady of the Lamp" because of the way she worked throughout the night tending



Pankhurst



Nightingale

sick and wounded soldiers during the Crimean War between 1854 and 1856. She met much resistance when she arrived at the military hospital at Scutari in Turkey, but eventually the casualties were so great that she was allowed to work on the wards and did much to improve the appalling conditions and raise hygiene standards.

On her return to London in 1860, she established the Nightingale School for Nurses, the first professional training school for nurses.

Margaret Thatcher (1925 -

This is a name which is probably more familiar than all the others, and Margaret Thatcher continues to be a living legend. Her accomplishments include becoming the first woman prime minister (1979-90) and indeed the first British prime minister to win three consecutive terms in the 20th century. When she resigned in 1990, she had been the longest-serving prime minister since 1827. Among her colleagues and opponents, she was viewed as a formidable character whose mind was not easily changed once it was made up. She is well-remembered for the "special relationship" she engendered between our two countries, particularly during Ronald Reagan's presidency.

Even in retirement, she continues to be sought after for speaking engagements the world over.

Betty Boothroyd (Date)

You will frequently see Betty Boothroyd if you watch Parliamentary debates on British television, for she is the current speaker of the House of Commons. There are two main things you will notice about her. One is that she wears the state robes and wig of the Speaker of the House and the other is that the word you will hear her utter more than any other is "order!"

Her duties include acting as chairman during political debates, and seeing that the rules laid down by the House for carrying on its business are observed. This can be quite a hard task during debates on emotional issues. She normally sits on her prestigious green leather chair from 2:30 - 4:30 p.m., 6:30 and 7:30 p.m. during Parlia-



Thatcher



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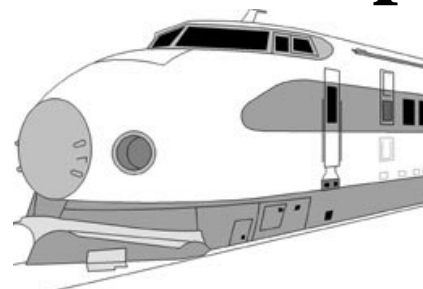
mentary sessions. For the rest of the time, one of the deputies will preside. The speaker is also the House's representative in its corporate relations with outside bodies and the other elements of Parliament, the House of Lords and the Crown.

Betty Boothroyd's appointment to this position in 1992 was unusual because she was the first woman ever to be chosen by the House as its speaker. She is also the first speaker to be chosen from the Opposition benches this century - she was only the third to be chosen from the Labour Party. She is a member of the Labour Party sitting as speaker during a Conservative government. The speaker may continue in office in a new Parliament. We have a General Election May 1.



Boothroyd

Linda's tip



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